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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria, Hamas, Secretary Rice's  
visit, Lebanon, Iraq (2/24-28)

11. Summary:

Syrian papers highlighted the meeting held by F.M. Walid al-Mo'alleem with Hamas leader Khaled Masha'al after the latter returned from his tour of the countries of the region. Ezeddin al-Darwish editorialized in Tishreen that he expects "further escalation" in the region after Secretary Rice's visit, as the issues she discussed are "escalatory and tailored to fit" Israel and because "the program of the visit and some of the meetings constituted a clear provocation." He added that the U.S. Administration wants to score successes at the expense of the Palestinians and Lebanese after it failed to do so in Iraq.

Samir Shibani opined in Tishreen that the occupation forces dissolved the Iraqi army and stripped Iraq of all the components of a state, leaving the arena open for death squads, bombings, assassinations, and destruction of mosques and places of worship.

End summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Bush expects escalation of tension in Iraq; news of U.S. intelligence and Mossad role in the bombings." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/26)

"Palestinian Premier Designate Hanieh heads toward formation of a national coalition government; EU released 120 million Euros for the Palestinians." (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/28)

"Washington opposes a draft resolution to establish a council for human rights." (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/28)

"F.M. Al-Mo'alleem stressed with Hamas leader Khaled Masha'al the importance of maintaining Palestinian national unity." (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/28)

"Lebanese circles call for blocking the path of the American plan and for preparation for national dialogue." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/27)

"Lahhoud: The parliamentary majority is inciting the Lebanese with the support of powers that are allied with Israel."  
(Government-owned Tishreen, 2/28)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Following Rice's Tour"  
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Ezzedin al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/26): "Following Rice's quick and highly suspicious tour to some countries of the region, the situation is likely to escalate, especially in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, as always is the case following such visits by American officials to the region.

"What confirms these expectations is that the issues brought by Secretary Rice and leaked by the media are escalatory and

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tailored to Israeli measurements.

"The U.S. Secretary of State wants the countries of the region to launch a war of famine and siege against the Hamas Movement and then against all of the Palestinian people, in accordance with an Israeli program that was adopted as an official policy following the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections.

"In Beirut Rice was clear in manifesting American arrogance, through statements and meetings whose objective was to escalate the Lebanese situation.

"All of the above means that the American Administration wants to achieve victories at the expense of the Palestinians and Lebanese since it has failed to do so in Iraq."

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"The Serpents of the Occupation and Sects"  
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Samir Al-Shibani a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/25): "The American-British occupation forces realize very well, more than others, that they are unable to assassinate Iraq. Three years after the invasion and various forms of violations, the occupation forces have failed to delete Iraq from the geographic map, the historical memory, and future horizons. On the other hand, these forces have become more convinced and aware that sectarian, confessional and ethnic strife is the only way for them to achieve those objectives and take this revenge -- the historic Zionist dream.

"The occupation forces dissolved the Iraqi army and stripped Iraq of all the components of a state. The arena was left open for death squads, bombings, assassinations, and teams of looters.

"The world has seen images of torture and human right violations that constitute a blot of shame on humanity's record. Programmed assassination of Iraqi brains has not ceased, and churches, mosques and places of worship have not been spared shelling and bombing. All this is happening in the presence of the American occupation army and its allies. The Iraqis have not tasted security, stability, peace or the alleged democracy for a single moment. On the contrary, they have tasted the tragic and horrible consequences of the occupation.

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